Pastry Shop

Sophia leans forward on the Formica countertop to give her aching body some relief. A bead of sweat tickles her back as it slides slowly down from her neck. Her dark hair is pulled back in a sloppy bun, secured with bobby pins. She sighs audibly and stands up straight, wiping her hands on her dirty apron. She has been awake since three a.m., getting to the pastry shop by four. She began her day rolling out ingredients, only stopping to steal a few sips from her frothy cappuccino. By seven a.m., a long line began to snake its way around the corner of the pastry shop- customers, eager to get their hands on the city’s best Italian pastries and world famous coffee. There would be orders rattled off and she would quickly job them down – six cannolis, a pasticiotti, three sfogliatelles, a ricotta pie- it didn’t matter what delicacy it was- she was almost always sold out by noon.

She had been coming to the shop for as long as she could remember. It had been her mother’s job to make the pastries before her. Sophia could remember being a young girl of about five or six, watching her mother intently as she mixed flour, sugar, butter; never measuring anything first. It always amazed her that her mother knew exactly the right amount of each ingredient to add. Sophia thought there must be a recipe card secretly secured in some obscure place that her mother cheated with, but after years of searching, she never found one. Later, she realized she could also measure ingredients by eye and memory and that no such card existed. But as a child, this seemed like an utterly impossible feat.

Her mother would hum a tune to herself as she mixed and kneaded. It seemed to Sophia a wordless lullaby, so peaceful that she sometimes put her head down on the counter and closed her eyes for a few extra minutes of precious sleep. She had, after all, been woken up by her mother at three a.m. so that she could go with her to the pastry shop before school began. Almost every day began like this; watching her mother work, listening to her mother hum her lullaby, and occasionally being given a job to complete. Sometimes she would be in charge of putting the sugar containers on the tables or changing the sign on the door so that it said “open”. Whatever it was, she loved being given a special duty. It made her feel important and helpful. But these little jobs also helped to engrain the shop into her soul. Every little task she completed became a part of who she is today.